Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405

March 31, 2017

Dear Interested Party:

The enclosed draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared regarding a potential one year grazing lease renewal on the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area (BTWMA). The 36,000 acre WMA is located in west-central Montana along the western and northern edge of the Big Belt Mountains, occupying land in both Lewis & Clark and Cascade Counties. Questions and comments on the EA will be accepted April 3 through April 24, 2017. The proposed grazing lease would allow cattle to be utilized as a management tool to remove residual vegetation, thus enhancing the availability and palatability of elk and mule deer forage on that portion of the WMA to be grazed. This portion of the WMA has been successfully grazed in a similar fashion with adjacent and cooperating lessee Sieben Live Stock Company since 2006.

If you need additional copies of the draft EA, please contact Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in Great Falls at (406) 454-5840. A copy of the draft EA is also available on Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' website at http//fwp.mt.gov – "Recent Public Notices".

Please send any written comments to the following address:

Beartooth WMA Grazing EA Comments
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405

Or

Email comments to: fwprg42@mt.gov

Sincerely,

Graham Taylor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4 Wildlife Manager
Great Falls, MT

Enclosed: Draft Beartooth WMA Grazing Environmental Assessment -
Grazing Lease Renewal Proposal Polloch Meadows/Upper Cottonwood Creek

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS - WILDLIFE DIVISION

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF GRAZING LEASE RENEWAL ON PORTION OF BEARTOOTH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
March 2017

In accordance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is required to assess the impacts that any proposal or project might have on the natural and human environments. Further, FWP's land lease-out policy, as it pertains to the disposition of interest in Department lands (89-1-209) requires and Environmental Assessment (EA) to be written for all new grazing leases, lease extensions or lease renewals.

A. PROJECT LOCATION

The 36,000 acre Beartooth Wildlife Management Area (BTWMA) is in west-central Montana along the western and northern edge of the Big Belt Mountains (Exhibit A). The BTWMA was purchased by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to provide: (1) yearlong habitat requirements of resident wildlife, including elk, bighorn sheep, mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, black bear, game birds and non-game wildlife (2) winter range for migratory elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep and (3) public outdoor recreational opportunities, especially hunting. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks purchased the BTWMA in 1970 from the M. Pierce Milton estate (32,320 acres). The Whitetail Prairie addition to the BTWMA was purchased from Voegele's Inc. in 2014 (3,680 acres).

The Wildlife Management Area (WMA) occupies land in both Lewis & Clark and Cascade Counties. Major drainages, including Cottonwood, Elkhorn and Willow Creeks flow into Holter Lake, an impoundment on the Missouri River. This rugged, mostly mountainous area ranges from 3,578 to 6,917 feet in elevation. The largest portion of the BTWMA lies in Lewis & Clark County; but lands do extend into Cascade County. Helena is approximately 24 air miles to the south-southwest and is 49 miles via roadways. The nearest town is Wolf Creek, which is 14 miles from the WMA Headquarters. Legal description of the BTWMA lands included in this grazing lease renewal proposal as follows:

Lewis & Clark County: Polloch Meadows Pasture (475 acres)
- T14N R02W, Portions of:
  - Sect 9 (E ½ NE ¼ NE ¼)
  - Sect 10 (N ½)
  - Sect 11 (S ½ N ½)

Lewis & Clark and Cascade Counties: Upper Cottonwood Creek Pasture (400 acres)
- T14N R02W, Portions of:
  - Sect 12 (E ½)
  - Sect 13 (E ½)
  - Sect 24 (NE ¼)
- T14N R01W, Portions of:
  - Sect 18 (NW ¼ SW ¼)

SUM: 875 acres

B. PROJECT NEED AND AREA DESCRIPTION

Various areas within the BTWMA were seeded to domestic grasses prior to FWP's acquisition of the management area, specifically the "Polloch Meadows" area of the Cottonwood Creek drainage. Domestic grass species included Timothy and Smooth Brome. Prior to the any vegetation treatments initiated in 1987, these tame grasses were very unpalatable during most times of the year, especially for winter forage for deer and elk. Many years of non-use by livestock along with minimal use by elk resulted in stands of rank, minimally productive vegetation. Residual plant material that built up over time limited and/or delayed annual growth. This residual vegetation limited the amount of new (more succulent) plant growth available to deer and elk, especially during spring and fall months. By periodically manipulating these sites through livestock grazing, a range of habitat conditions can be maintained and enhanced, while ensuring vegetation and soil health goals are met. Livestock grazing is one management tool that can be utilized to address these surface litter conditions. Other goals are to promote maximum plant production, vigor and nutrient content, along with increasing the attractiveness of late fall and spring forage to wildlife species, especially elk and deer. Upper meadow areas near timber line consist primarily of rough fescue, Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass. Riparian areas of Cottonwood Creek consist of aspen, dogwood, willow, birch, black cottonwood, Rocky Mountain maple and chokecherry. The Polloch Meadows grazing system was revisited and implemented in 2006 having good success in enhancing smooth brome palatability. Stocking rates and grazing timing has much improved the effectiveness of the system as compared to attempts in 1987.

The Upper Cottonwood area is a northerly facing slope which is primarily used during summer and fall months by elk and deer, along with other wildlife species. The pasture includes the "headwaters" of Cottonwood Creek. Naive grass species including rough fescue, Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass are the primary focus. North facing timber stands consist mainly of lodgepole pine and Douglas fir, along with an aspen community in/around the headwaters of Cottonwood Creek. Prior to 2012, the area had not been manipulated by livestock and has large amounts of residual cover. Removing this old litter stimulated regrowth, improved vegetative conditions, vigor and range health. This, in turn, is now much more attractive to wildlife species, especially elk.

Table 1. BTWMA Polloch Meadows Grazing Treatments, 1987-1990.

Year	Grazing Dates	AUM's	Cost/AUM	Grazing Fee
1987	8/1 – 9/15	269	$1.35	$453.94
1988	Rest	0	N/A	0
1989	8/1 – 9/15	316	$1.86	$587.76
1990	Rest	0	N/A	0

Table 2. BTWMA Polloch Meadows Grazing Treatments 2006 – 2016. Lease ID: 4062.7(B)04

Year	Treatment	AUM's	Grazing Dates	Grazing Fee
2006	A	464	5/18 – 6/29	$3,480
2007	C	Rested due to fire	N/A	$0
2008	A	510	6/3 - 6/30	$3,825
2009	B	341.7	7/17-8/19	$2,562.84
2010	C	Rested	N/A	$0
2011	A	440.3	5/27 – 6/20	$3,302
2012	B	486	7/19 – 8/15	$3,392.25
2013	C	Rested	N/A	$0
2014	A	276	5/19-6-19	$2,180.00
2015	B	279	7/8 – 8/21	$2,204.10
2016	C	Rested		$0

Approximate Grazing Treatment Dates: 475 ACRES
A = Full Season Grazing (May 15-July 1)
B = Post Seed Ripe Grazing (July 1-August 31)
C = Complete Rest

Table 3. BTWMA Upper Cottonwood Pasture Treatments 2012 – 2016. Lease ID: 4062.7(B)04

Year	Treatment	AUM's	Grazing Dates	Grazing Fee
2012	A	487	6/28 – 7/18	$1,005.75
2013	B	190	8/14 – 9/4	$1,501.00
2014	C	Rested	N/A	$0
2015	A	261	5/27 – 7/7	$2,061.90
2016	B	219	6/28 – 7/0	$1,730.10

Approximate Grazing Treatment Dates: 400 ACRES
A = Full Season Grazing (May 15-July 1)
B = Post Seed Ripe Grazing (July 1-August 31)
C = Complete Rest

C. GOALS

Habitat goals of the WMA are to provide maximum vegetative cover (abundance) and quality plant composition (nutrition/palatability) as related to wildlife needs and soil/watershed protection on native ranges associated with the BTWMA. Proposals for grazing of domestic livestock must meet this goal, along with objectives as described in the WMA Management Plan.

D. PROJECT SCOPE

The proposed grazing lease would be a one-year renewal using similar grazing schematics as the expiring lease with the same lessee (Sieben Live Stock). These pastures would utilize a rest rotation grazing scheme (Exhibit B). Due to the topography in the area, yearling Angus cattle have worked very well in the past to achieve grazing objectives and should continue to do so. Dates of grazing use will be dictated by 1) plant phenology to include spring green-up and plant availability and 2) forage consumption in the active pasture and 3) hunting and recreational demands upon the area (out of BTWMA by Sept 1 due to archery seasons). It is expected that general season dates for these events will approximate the following: May 20 – July 1 for full season grazing, July 1 – August 31 for post seed ripe grazing. Followed by a third year of complete rest (Table 4). All pastures in the rest rotation grazing plan will have 2 growing seasons of rest (one full season) per 3-year grazing cycle (Table 4).

Table 4. BTWMA Polloch Meadows / Upper Cottonwood / WT Prairie Grazing Treatments Proposed.

YEAR	BTWMA Polloch Meadows	BTMWA Upper Cottonwood
2018	A	C
ACRES	*475 AC*	*400 AC*

Grazing Treatments:
A = Full Season Grazing (May 20-July 1)
B = Post Seed Ripe Grazing (July 1-August 31)
C = Complete Rest

The lessee will be required to provide labor and materials to install temporary electric poly wire fence on pasture boundaries where permanent fence does not exist to implement the system. The lessee will also be responsible for both temporary and permanent fence maintenance in the pastures, cattle movement during active grazing seasons, and prevent and remedy trespass livestock problems if they arise. The lessee will be required to maintain all livestock watering systems and to pay the costs of operating such. The lessee may access the area via motorized travel from neighboring private lands to conduct such activities. After each grazing rotation, the lessee will be required to remove the temporary electric fence each of those years within 3 days after cattle are removed from the pasture.

Grazing rates are based on an Animal Unit Basis (AUM). Value of this grazing lease would be determined based on the 2018 FWP Standard Grazing Rate, which was $24/AUM for 2017. The rate will be adjusted in 2018. As per FWP policy, 50% of the Standard rate may be offered as an incentive for the lessee to incorporate land and be responsible for WMA fence maintenance services, as described with this grazing

agreement. An average monthly stocking rate of approximately 400 AUM's is indicated based on available forage, water, pasture size and layout, desired grazing proficiency and observed effectiveness of livestock grazing abilities in the immediate area. In exchange for grazing the BTWMA, Sieben Live Stock also agrees to continue to allow reasonable free public hunting on their ranch during Fish and Wildlife Commission-approved seasons. Sieben Live Stock has been enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program since the programs' inception. The Ranch provides hunters thousands of hunter days annually.

E. ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

ITEM	MAJOR	MOD.	MINOR	NONE	UNK.	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
Terrestrial & Aquatic Life & Habitats			X			X
Water Quality, Quantity & Distribution			X			X
Geology & Soil Quality, Stability & Moisture			X			X
Vegetation Cover, Quality, & Quantity			X			X
Aesthetics			X			X
Air Quality				X		
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, Air, & Energy				X		

F. EXPLANATION OF IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

TERRESTRIAL & AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS

While grazing, livestock will reduce the amount of forage in the area during the grazing lease period. It is expected that the project will have a positive long-term impact on range and wildlife habitat for elk, mule deer, whitetail deer and many non-game species of wildlife. Primary species to benefit from the grazing is expected to be elk. The anticipated positive impact is the result of decadent residual vegetation being removed, which should enhance both spring and fall green-up conditions. Green-up vegetative conditions provide more palatable and attractive vegetation conditions for wildlife. Sufficient forage is available to big game on the remainder of the WMA and the surrounding landscapes to offset any short-term loss of forage due to livestock use. Due to the time and duration of the proposed grazing lease, impacts to any non-game wildlife in the area should be minimal, although, the reduction in residual cover could have a negative impact on ground nesting birds during dates of use. Two consecutive growing seasons of rest following a grazing treatment will greatly benefit these species in the long-term.

WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION

A portion of the Cottonwood Creek drainage is the only riparian habitat potentially affected by the proposed grazing treatment. Although the riparian vegetation within the treatment area will have some minor impacts during the of livestock usage, there should be no long-term effects. Hoof action from livestock grazing

should provide a positive benefit to riparian soil quality by helping to break down old residual vegetative material, thereby, returning nutrients to the soil. Impacts on Cottonwood Creek water quality, quantity and distribution will be minimal at best.

GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY, AND MOISTURE

Some impacts to soil conditions may occur due to trampling, trailing or grazing in localized, high use areas, especially around water tanks (if applicable) and salting areas. The grazing capacity estimate is believed to be a conservative estimate, so the risk of overgrazing induced erosion should be minimal. Hoof action from livestock grazing should provide a positive benefit to soil quality by helping to break down old residual vegetative material, thereby, returning nutrients to the soil.

VEGETATION COVER, QUALITY, AND QUANTITY

While vegetation cover and quantity will be decreased while livestock are grazing the area, vegetation quality should dramatically increase following grazing treatment because of removing residual decadent plant material, allowing for two consecutive growing seasons of rest (Table 4). Plant and soil disturbance as the result of grazing may enhance seed placement, germination, and seedling establishment for both desirable and undesirable plant species.

AESTHETICS

Domestic livestock and signs of livestock use on the BTWMA may be objectionable to some segments of the public. This area of the BTWMA generally receives minimal public use during the time when livestock would be present due to pasture locations being 5-10 miles from the nearest public access point. Also, cattle will only be in the proposed pastures approximately 4-6 weeks during grazing treatment (Table 4). In addition, livestock grazing on other portions of the WMA and neighboring lands is a common practice. The WMA has another rest-rotation grazing system with neighboring landowner Sieben Live Stock since 1996 on 21,440 acres (16,480 acres SLS, 4,960 acres BTWMA) that has proven very successful in enhancing vegetation and habitat conditions for wildlife. Livestock has been used to treat the proposed pastures in some fashion since 2006, along with a rich history of livestock grazing in the area communities, thus public users of the WMA are accustomed to seeing livestock in the area.

G. ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIROMENT

ITEM	MAJOR	MOD.	MINOR	NONE	UNK.	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED SHEETS
Social Structures and Mores				X		
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity				X		
Local and State Tax Base and Tax Revenue				X		
Agricultural or Industrial Production				X		
Human Health				X		
Access to & Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities			X			X
Quantity and Distribution of Employment				X		
Distribution and						

Density of Population and Housing				X		
Demands for Energy				X		
Locally Adopted Environmental Plans and Goals				X		
Transportation Network and Traffic Flows				X		

H. EXPLANATION OF IMPACTS TO THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES

Livestock and livestock sign on FWP Wildlife Management Areas may seem out of place for some segments of the public. However, the WMA has historically, and currently, utilized livestock grazing to enhance vegetative conditions for wildlife species. Many of FWP's Wildlife Management Areas have grazing systems in place to improve habitat quality, quantity and conditions for wildlife species, with great success. In addition, the proposed area to be leased for grazing receives minimal public use during the summer, and livestock will be removed prior to the archery hunting season. Along with the "Grazing Stipulations and Terms of Payment" described in Appendix B, FWP requires lessees to allow reasonable public hunting on their private lands during Fish & Wildlife Commission approved seasons as terms of any grazing lease. Sieben Live Stock has been enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program since the programs' inception and has a long history of public access in the community. The Ranch provides hunters thousands of hunter days annually.

I. DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

1. No action (no grazing lease) alternative:
    - Decadent residual vegetation will increase and remain, the area will become increasingly unattractive to elk, other game and nongame wildlife species.
    - Elk will likely use forage on adjacent private land in large numbers especially during the spring, early summer and winter time periods.

2. Proposed action (provide grazing lease) alternative:
    - Reduction in decadent residual vegetation, which in turn improves forage conditions and availability in the long term.
    - Soil and plant disturbance that will benefit seedling establishment of both desirable and possibly undesirable plant species.
    - Provide for better fall and/or spring green-up vegetation for elk and other wildlife species
    - Promote maximum plant production, vigor and nutrient content.

J. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CONCLUSION

It has been determined that no significant impacts to the physical and human environment will result due to the proposed action alternative, therefore an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

K. SCHEDULED PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A public comment period will begin April 3 through April 24, 2017. Duration for the comment period for the Environmental Assessment is 21 days. A public hearing is not scheduled. Written comment should be delivered to the following address:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Wildlife Division - % Beartooth WMA
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Or

E-Mail: fwprg42@mt.gov (Include Beartooth WMA Grazing in Subject Heading)

After the 21-day comment period, a Decision Notice will be produced by the FWP Region 4 Supervisor based on public input. The Decision Notice will be supplied to the Fish & Wildlife Commission for a final decision to approve/disapprove the proposed lease renewal at their regularly scheduled meeting in June 2017.

Appendix A.

Legal description of the BTWMA lands included in the Polloch Meadows and Upper Cottonwood Creek grazing system proposal:

FWP Lease ID: 4062.7(B)04

Lewis & Clark County: Polloch Meadows Pasture

T14N R02W, Portions of:

Sect 9 (E ½ NE ¼ NE ¼)
Sect 10 (N ½)
Sect 11 (S ½ N ½)

Lewis & Clark and Cascade Counties: Upper Cottonwood Creek Pasture

T14N R02W, Portions of:

Sect 12 (E ½)
Sect 13 (E ½)
Sect 24 (NE ¼)

T14N R01W, Portions of:

Sect 18 (NW ¼ SW ¼)

See project location maps and grazing description in Exhibits A and B, Appendix B (respectively).

Appendix B. Beartooth Wildlife Management Area

Polloch Meadows/Upper Cottonwood Creek Grazing Lease Renewal Proposal
March 2017

INTRODUCTION:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is proposing to renew an expiring livestock grazing lease on portions the of the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area for one year (2018). Principles of rest-rotation grazing would continue to be used to maintain and/or enhance wildlife habitat for the resource and public benefit. Specifically, this grazing is designed to improve habitat quality and quantity for a variety of wildlife species, particularly elk, mule and white-tailed deer, ruffed and dusky grouse and a variety of nongame wildlife species.

Wildlife habitat would be enhanced by resting, deferring and rotating cattle grazing on certain pastures at precise times, and by stocking the grazed pastures at levels that will ensure that the condition of the upland and riparian plant communities are maintained and/or improved.

The 36,000 acre Beartooth Wildlife Management Area (BTWMA) is located in west-central Montana along the western and northern edge of the Big Belt Mountains (Exhibit A). The Wildlife Management Area (WMA) occupies land in both Lewis & Clark and Cascade Counties. Major drainages, including Cottonwood, Elkhorn and Willow Creeks flow into Holter Lake, an impoundment on the Missouri River. This rugged, mostly mountainous area ranges from 3,578 to 6,917 feet in elevation. The BTWMA was purchased in 1970 by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks from the M. Pierce Milton estate (32,320 acres). The Whitetail Prairie addition to the BTWMA was purchased from Voegele's Inc. in 2014 (3,680 acres).

The pastures included in this proposed lease renewal are locally known as "Polloch Meadows" and "Upper Cottonwood". These proposed grazing pastures are in the northern portion of the WMA (Exhibits A and B). The legal description of the lands included in this proposal is detailed in Appendix A.

In 1992, on the BTWMA and neighboring Sieben Live Stock deeded lands, a 3-pasture, rest-rotation grazing system was implemented on a 21,440-acre area (Cow Camp Lease). This grazing system has greatly benefited both the BTWMA and the cooperator's lands involved, improving vegetative conditions for wildlife species, especially elk. This grazing system remains in place today.

From 1987-1990, a grazing system in Polloch meadows was attempted, with limited success (Table 1). In 2006, in the "Polloch Meadows" area of the BTWMA, a single 475-acre pasture grazing treatment was implemented to improve forage quality. This system has greatly enhanced the palatability of the remnant introduced hay fields (consisting of mostly smooth brome). The 6-year grazing lease expired in 2011. In 2012, the lease was renewed and expanded to include a 400-acre pasture near Upper Cottonwood Creek on BTWMA. This lease is due to expire in 2017. The proposal is to renew the Polloch Meadows/Upper Cottonwood grazing lease for one (1) year continuing the same grazing rotation schematic as the expiring lease (Tables 2, 3 and 4) with the same lessee (Sieben Live Stock). Details of the project area and proposed grazing system are further defined in this document.

The present overall Management Goals for the BTWMA include:

"To manage for highly productive, diverse plant communities that will provide quality forage and cover for native wildlife species, emphasizing elk, while providing opportunity for public hunting and other outdoor recreation."

Consistent with that goal, certain management objectives have been identified. They include (but are not limited to) the following:

"To provide the year-long habitat requirements of resident wildlife, including 500 elk, 100 bighorn sheep, 300 mule deer, 100 white-tailed deer, 50 antelope, black bear, game birds and non-game wildlife."

"To provide winter range for 5 1/2 months for an additional 1,000 elk, 200 mule deer and 100 white-tailed deer from surrounding public and private lands."

"To manage grassland vegetation, with emphasis on Rough Fescue (*Festuca scabrella)* and other native bunchgrass species, so that wildlife (particularly big game) species are provided abundant and nutritious forage."

Other management goals and objectives address such issues as elk depredations on neighboring private lands, fisheries management, hunting and recreational activities, deed restrictions addressing management, subdivision and commercial limitations on the BTWMA. Within the context of the objectives listed above, it is proposed that a Grazing Management Program be continued on portions of the BTWMA for habitat enhancement.

GRAZING OBJECTIVES AND PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION:
Various areas within the BTWMA were seeded to domestic grasses prior to FWP's acquisition of the management area, specifically the "Polloch Meadows" area of the Cottonwood Creek drainage. Domestic grass species included Timothy and Smooth Brome. Prior to the 2006-2011 grazing system in Polloch Meadows, these tame grasses were very unpalatable during most times of the year, especially for winter forage for deer and elk. Several years of non-use by livestock and minimal use by elk resulted in stands of rank, minimally productive vegetation. Residual plant material that built up over time limited and/or delayed annual growth. This residual vegetation limited the amount of new (more succulent) plant growth available to deer and elk, especially during spring and fall months. By periodically manipulating these sites through livestock grazing, a range of habitat conditions can be maintained and enhanced, while ensuring vegetation and soil health goals are met. Livestock grazing is one management tool that can be utilized to address these surface litter conditions. Other goals are to promote maximum plant production, vigor and nutrient content, along with increasing the attractiveness of late fall and spring forage to wildlife species, especially elk and deer. Upper meadow areas near timber line consist primarily of rough fescue, Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass. Riparian areas of Cottonwood Creek consist of aspen, dogwood, willow, birch, black cottonwood, Rocky Mountain maple and chokecherry. As mentioned, the Polloch Meadows grazing system was revisited and implemented in 2006 having much success improving smooth brome palatability. Stocking rates and grazing timing has much improved the effectiveness of the system as compared to attempts in 1987.

The Upper Cottonwood area is a northerly facing slope which is primarily used during summer and fall months by elk and deer, along with other wildlife species. The pasture includes the "headwaters" of Cottonwood Creek. Native grass species including rough fescue, Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass are the primary focus. North facing timber stands consist mainly of lodgepole pine and Douglas fir, along with an aspen community in/around the headwaters of Cottonwood Creek. Prior to 2012, the area had not been manipulated by livestock and had large amounts of residual cover. Removing this old litter stimulated regrowth, improved vegetative conditions, vigor and range health. This, in turn, is now much more attractive to wildlife species, especially elk.

Table 1. BTWMA Polloch Meadows Grazing Treatments, 1987-1990.

Year	Grazing Dates	AUM's	Cost/AUM	Grazing Fee
1987	8/1 – 9/15	269	$1.35	$453.94
1988	Rest	0	N/A	0
1989	8/1 – 9/15	316	$1.86	$587.76
1990	Rest	0	N/A	0

Table 2. BTWMA Polloch Meadows Grazing Treatments 2006 – 2016. Lease ID: 4062.7(B)04

Year	Treatment	AUM's	Grazing Dates	Grazing Fee
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2007	C	Rested due to fire	N/A	$0
2008	A	510	6/3 - 6/30	$3,825
2009	B	341.7	7/17-8/19	$2,562.84
2010	C	Rested	N/A	$0
2011	A	440.3	5/27 – 6/20	$3,302
2012	B	486	7/19 – 8/15	$3,392.25
2013	C	Rested	N/A	$0
2014	A	276	5/19-6-19	$2,180.00
2015	B	279	7/8 – 8/21	$2,204.10
2016	C	Rested		$0

Approximate Grazing Treatment Dates: 475 ACRES
A = Full Season Grazing (May 15-July 1)
B = Post Seed Ripe Grazing (July 1-August 31)
C = Complete Rest

Table 3. BTWMA Upper Cottonwood Pasture Treatments 2012 – 2016. Lease ID: 4062.7(B)04

Year	Treatment	AUM's	Grazing Dates	Grazing Fee
2012	A	487	6/28 – 7/18	$1,005.75
2013	B	190	8/14 – 9/4	$1,501.00
2014	C	Rested	N/A	$0
2015	A	261	5/27 – 7/7	$2,061.90
2016	B	219	6/28 – 7/0	$1,730.10

Approximate Grazing Treatment Dates: 400 ACRES
A = Full Season Grazing (May 15-July 1)
B = Post Seed Ripe Grazing (July 1-August 31)
C = Complete Rest

GOALS:

To provide maximum vegetative cover (abundance) and quality plant composition (nutrition/palatability) as related to wildlife needs and soil/watershed protection on native ranges associated with the BTWMA. Proposals for grazing of domestic livestock must meet the goals and objectives for management of the BTWMA as listed above and as described in the WMA Management Plan.

HABITAT GRAZING SYSTEM STIPULATIONS / TERMS OF PAYMENT

The proposed one- year grazing lease renewal would use the same grazing schematics as the expiring lease with the same lessee (Sieben Live Stock). Due to the topography in the area, yearling Angus cattle have worked very well in the past to achieve grazing objectives and should continue to do so. Dates of grazing use will be dictated by 1) plant phenology to include spring green-up and plant availability and 2) forage consumption in the active pasture and 3) hunting and recreational demands upon the area (out of BTWMA by Sept 1 due to archery seasons). It is expected that general season dates for these events will approximate the following: May 20 – July 1 for full season grazing, July 1 – August 31 for post seed ripe grazing. Followed by a third year of complete rest (Table 4). All pastures in the rest rotation grazing plan continue to have 2 growing seasons of rest (one full season) per 3-year grazing cycle (Table 4).

The lessee will be required to provide labor and materials to install temporary electric poly wire fence on pasture boundaries where permanent fence does not exist to implement the system. The lessee will also be responsible for both temporary and permanent fence maintenance in the pastures, cattle movement during active grazing seasons, and prevent and remedy trespass livestock problems if they arise. The lessee will be required to maintain all livestock watering systems and to pay the costs of operating such. The lessee may access the area via motorized travel from neighboring private lands to conduct such activities. After each grazing rotation, the lessee will be required to remove the temporary electric fence each of those years within 3 days after cattle are removed from the pasture.

Table 4. BTWMA Polloch Meadows / Upper Cottonwood Grazing Treatment Proposal.

YEAR	BTWMA Polloch Meadows	BTMWA Upper Cottonwood
2018	A	C
ACRES	*475 AC*	*400 AC*

Grazing Treatments:
A = Full Season Grazing (May 20-July 1)
B = Post Seed Ripe Grazing (July 1-August 31)
C = Complete Rest

Grazing rates are based on an Animal Unit Basis (AUM). Value of this grazing lease would be determined based on the 2018 FWP Standard Grazing Rate, which was $24/AUM for 2017. The rate would be adjusted in 2018. As per FWP policy, 50% of the Standard rate may be offered as an incentive for the lessee to incorporate land and be responsible for WMA fence maintenance services, as described with this grazing agreement. An average monthly stocking rate of approximately 400 AUM's is indicated based on available forage, water, pasture size and layout, desired grazing proficiency and observed effectiveness of livestock grazing abilities in the immediate area. In exchange for grazing the BTWMA, Sieben Live Stock also agrees to continue to allow reasonable free public hunting on their ranch during Fish and Wildlife Commission-approved seasons. Sieben Live Stock has been enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program since the programs' inception. The Ranch provides hunters thousands of hunter days annually.

MONITORING/PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:
Trends in vegetation composition and livestock use will continue to be monitored via photo plots and/or photos. Monitoring will be a cooperative effort by the Area Biologist and Range Specialist/Plant Ecologist. Owing to the keen public interest in the area, its resources and accessibility, public education and informational efforts may be necessary to showcase the grazing pastures. The Devil's Kitchen Management Team, along with local sporting groups such as Russell Country Sportsmen and Great Falls Chapter Safari Club International will also continue to be a vital part in public communication efforts for this grazing proposal. Previous discussions on habitat manipulation techniques and wildlife management efforts on the WMA have received much support from these groups. An Environmental Assessment will be compiled by FWP staff, which will be open to the public for a 21-day comment period, resulting in the production of a Decision Notice from the FWP Region 4 Supervisor based on public input. The Decision Notice will be supplied to the Fish & Wildlife Commission for a final decision to approve/disapprove the proposed lease renewal at their regularly scheduled meeting in June 2017.

Exhibit A. Beartooth Wildlife Management Area Location.

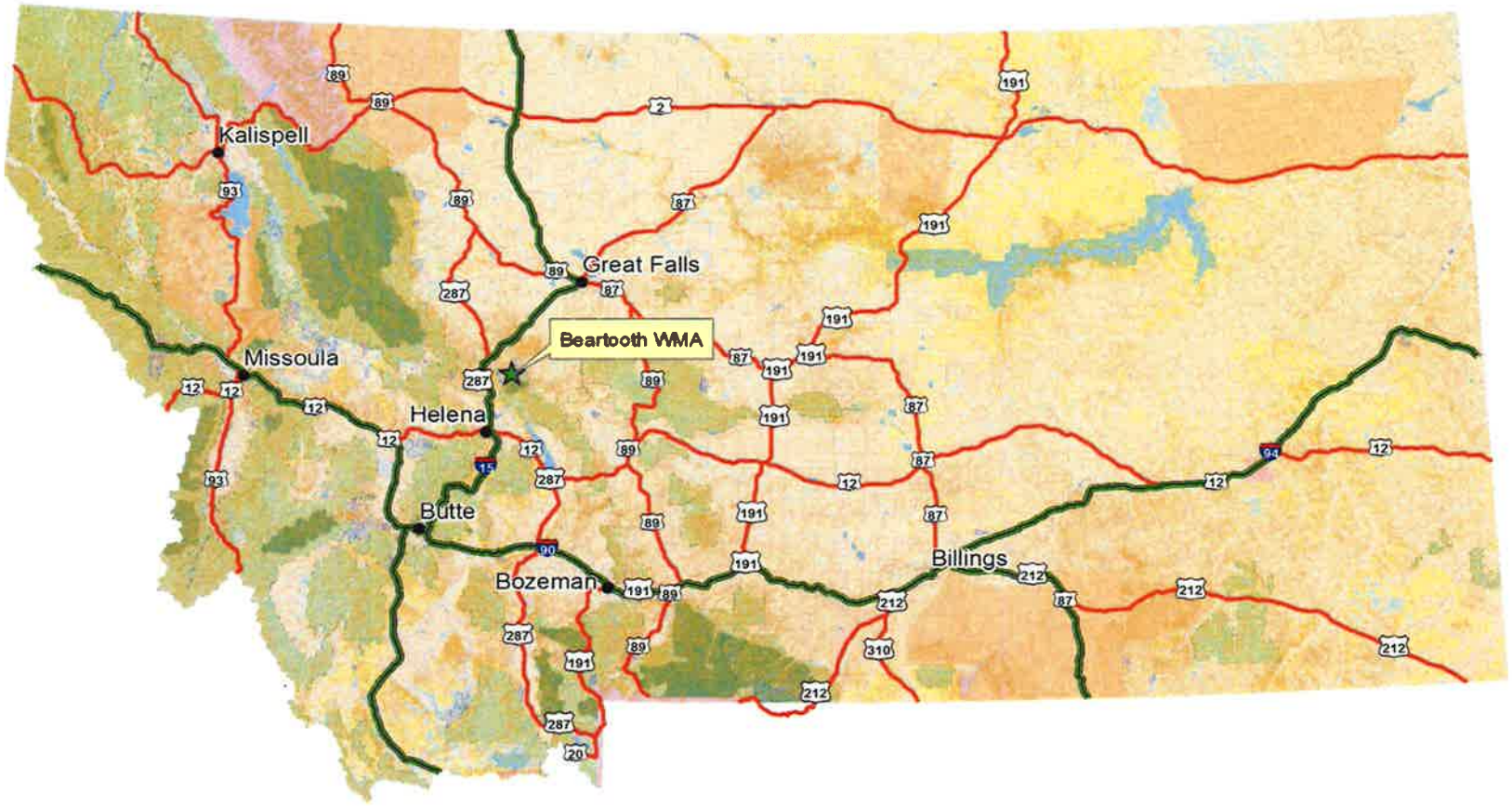

Exhibit B. BTWMA Polloch Meadows / Upper Cottonwood Creek Pastures